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ABSTRACT

With the advent of site-based management, principals must respond to growing pressures to provide students and staff with a safe teaching and learning environment. This paper examines junior-high school principals' understanding of violence. The paper focuses on the context of violence within the principals' schools, the factors that influenced strategies to address violence, the processes involved in making such decisions, and the perceived effectiveness of practices and programs aimed at violent behaviors in their schools. The report positions violence-prevention strategies within the larger context of leadership and school effectiveness by considering the role that assumptions, values, and perceptions play in decisions regarding school violence. For the study, principals (N=12) from a large urban district in Western Canada, who were selected due to their involvement in school-violence-prevention initiatives, were given semistructured interviews. Findings show that the principals described violence in broad terms, conceptualizing it as a symptom of other problems that were often under the direct control of schools. The principals saw violence as arising from other problems and viewed discipline as an opportunity to teach students interpersonal skills. A definition of violence was derived from their views. (Contains 42 references.) RJM)

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Navigating Towards a Safe and Caring School

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Navigating Towards a Safe and Caring School

Purpose and Significance of the Study

As an issue, school violence has drawn widespread concern from educators (e.g., Alberta Education, 1993; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994; New Brunswick Teachers' Federation, 1979), as well as the public - largely reflected through media coverage (e.g., Onstad, 1997; Stewart, 1995). Schools have responsed with a wide range of strategies ranging from zero tolerance policies to the introduction of conflict management skills into the curriculum. Unfortunately, practice has often preceded research, due in part, to the difficulties associated with evaluating a complex social issue such as violence as well as the demands of parents and the public for "quick action."

In Alberta, Canada, the recent demand for resources and information regarding school-based violence prevention strategies has been overwhelming. Schools have requested information ranging from the use of surveillance cameras in schools, student identification tags, anger management programs and "time-out" rooms. These inquiries have come, despite claims by some researchers (e.g., Dolmage, 1996; Wall, 1995; Webber, 1995) that school violence is an exaggeraied and low-key problem. Thus, it is not known how much of current interest has been sparked by actual incidents, heightened awareness, decreased tolerance, or political pressure.

With the advent of site-based management, principals in particular, are faced with the challenge to respond to growing pressures to provide students and staff with a safe teaching and learning environment. The question is: How do principals influence the direction taken in their schools to respond to issues of violence, and on what basis do they make such decisions?

This paper introduces a consolidation of key findings reflected in the doctoral dissertation: *School violence: Administrative leadership in decision making* (MacDonald, 1998). The focus of that study was to examine junior high school principals' understandings of: (a) the context of "violence" within their school, (b) the factors which influenced decisions regarding strategies to respond to or prevent violence, (c) the processes involved in making such decisions, and (d) the perceived effectiveness of practices and programs designed to address violent behaviors in their school.

From a theoretical perspective, the study positioned violence prevention strategies within the larger context of leadership and school effectiveness by considering the role that assumptions, values, and perceptions played in relation to decisions regarding school violence.

Linking these concepts (e.g., leadership, decision making), to school violence initiatives offered insights that have been largely absent in prior research.

Review of Related Literature

Educators (e.g., Auty, 1993), researchers (e.g., MacDonald, 1995, 1997; Mathews, 1994) and police (e.g., Newark & Kessel, 1994) believe that schools must pay more attention to the development and expansion of policies and programs that deal with school violence. What is not as readily agreed upon are the specifics of what should be done, what can be realistically achieved, and who should facilitate such initiatives. In some instances, policies are being developed by school boards on the basis of political pressure, a desire to be viewed as being proactive, or as a result of a critical violent incident. Although the list of available resources for schools is expanding rapidly, research outlining the criteria used to select from amongst various strategies is inadequately addressed in the literature. Even more evident, is the lack of clarity or consistency in conceptualizing the issue of school violence itself.

Describing School Violence: An Evolution of Terms

An analysis of research and media reports suggested that student misbehavior has, in fact, experienced an evolution of terms. In the seventies, for example, an Alberta task force (Clarke, 1977) termed punching, acts of vandalism, fighting, swearing and back talk, as *discipline* problems. The 1981 Canadian issue of *Today* alarmed its readers with statistics on the costs to taxpayers of vandalism in Vancouver schools. The article suggested that Canadian schools were in trouble, experiencing increased *delinquency* amongst their students. Within a decade of the publication of this article, vandalism was considered to be a *violent* behavior (e.g., MacDougall, 1993).

As *violence* was expanded to include non-criminal behaviors (e.g., bullying) and more covert activities (e.g., exclusion, mean spirited teasing), it became more difficult to assess the true nature and extent of *violent* behaviors in schools. Expanding the definition of violence resulted in lumping together a myriad of behaviors and activities that were *disruptive*, but not necessarily *violent*. Grouping behavioral or discipline problems together with crime and violence, led to misleading statistics, often resulting in public hysteria over the safety of schools. (Wayson, 1985).

By the early nineties, the prevailing view of school violence in Canada, was that it included a continuum of behaviors which resulted in either physical or psychological harm:

"all physical and nonphysical acts that are seriously harmful to others, unjust and/or unlawful" (Alberta Education, 1993), " . . . the threat or use of force that injures or intimidates a person [makes them feel afraid]" (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994, p. 4).

Although using the term "violence" to describe unacceptable student behaviors raised public awareness and concern for the difficulties that teachers were experiencing in the classroom, media coverage of serious incidents further fuelled public dissatisfaction with public education. So too, the term "violence" conjured images of criminality and deviance that were often perceived to be beyond the purview of schools, affording educators with the opportunity to delegate response to violence to law enforcers and the courts.

Recent initiatives (Alberta Education, 1996) and school resource guides (Canadian Education Association, 1996) are now framing these same issues of violent student behaviors as "disruptive." The Canadian Education Association's most recent report (1996) begins by stating that "both educators themselves and the general public see disruptive student behavior as a major concern in schools today" (p. 2). The report uses examples such as: breaking rules (e.g., fighting), lack of self-discipline, and disturbing classroom learning, to illustrate disruptive behavior.

In a sense, the term "disruptive behaviors," has repositioned the issue as an educational one. Whereas "violence" (e.g., MacDougall, 1993) suggested criminality or disfunction - viewing students as either victims or perpetrators - disruptive behaviors speak to educational issues by focusing on those activities that disrupt the process of learning and teaching. The continuum of behaviors that can meet the criteria of "disrupting" schools is as, if not more, expansive than violent ones, with the difference being that "disruption" is less prone to media attention and politicization.

This evolution of terms has had a noticeable influence on the directions taken by some policy makers. For example, initiatives introduced a few years ago (e.g., *Violence-free schools policy*, Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1994), targetted violence reduction as an end by reiterating the inappropriate behaviors to eliminate, or punish. More recent strategies (e.g., *Safe and Caring Schools Initiative*, Alberta Education, 1996) have focused on describing what constitues as safe and caring school that promotes effective teaching and learning.

Strategies to Deal with School Violence

Although there is general agreement that the sources of youth violence are complex and multi-faceted, there is less consensus regarding which criteria should be used in determining the most effective responses. Criminologists and police, for example, believe that the swiftness and certainty of punishment are more influential than the severity of the punishment (Gabor, 1995). And yet, teachers' federations (e.g., British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994) and school boards (e.g., Alberta School Boards Association, 1993) have lobbied the government to stiffen penalties for perpetrators of violence. Zero tolerance policies, which seek to punish or suppress serious disruptive or violent student behaviors, are gaining popularity at a time when researchers (e.g., Shostak, 1986; Yonker, 1983) are linking disruptive behavior in the classroom to "fear, threat, negative attitudes, bored students and the power struggle between students and school staff" " (Yonker, 1983, p. 126).

In a 1995 study (MacDonald) of 28 school administrators and 231 students in Alberta junior high schools, principals offered varied approaches to dealing with school violence. Of the comments received, 19 percent suggested a community-based resolution; 31 percent advocated greater consequences for offenders; 23 percent of respondents sought zero tolerance of school violence strategies; 42 percent felt that solutions lay in more student rules and clearer behavior expectations; and 26 percent advocated for a greater awareness of school violence issues. In followup research (MacDonald, 1997), junior high schools students suggested that violence prevention strategies often failed because school staff: (a) were not willing to consider the underlying causes for such behaviors, (b) modelled uncaring behaviors themselves and (c) were too quick to punish or remove disruptive students, rather than take the time to solve the real problems (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Weissglass, 1996).

For decades, models of discipline have focused on monitoring, judging acceptability and punishing when necessary. Student behavior and discipline policies did not necessarily address: (a) pro-social skills development, (b) empowerment of students to take responsibility for regulating their own behavior, and (c) meaningful opportunities for students to learn and practice self-discipline (Reed & Strahan, 1995). Rather, students learned that conflict resolution was best deferred to those in authority - the assumption being that pupil control was only possible by enforcing and maintaining order and discipline (Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

Punitive discipline has not significantly reduced school violence. If anything, it has either moved such activities off school grounds, or exacerbated the problem (Toby, 1993). More effectives measures point to strategies such as: (a) developing positive behavior programs that

recognize the exemplary acts of students, (b) allocating resources that enable teachers to organize extra-curricular activities to promote a team environment amongst students, (c) promoting student involvement in behavior plan formulation, (d) initiating school programs that recognize community service as an integral contribution by students, and (e) teaching students the skills needed for peaceful and cooperative problem solving (Weissglass, 1996).

The Role of Schools

Over a decade ago, Nelsen (1985) argued that "schooling is socialization that standardizes, and often eliminates emotions to fit the bureaucratic routine of corporate workplaces" (p. 136). But, in North America, the workplace has evolved significantly from the once dominating bureaucracies. Today, the corporate community places a high demand for workers who exhibit emotional intelligence, creative problem solving skills, and self-actualized learning. Unfortunately, student control through punitive sanctions; expectations to follow rules without question; passive learning; and a lack of opportunities to influence decisions reflect a model of schooling that does not provide opportunities for creative problem solving, social and emotional skill development (Postman, 1995).

In their recent book, *Schooling for change: Reinventing education for young adolescents*, Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) suggested that "one of the most fundamental reforms needed . . . is to make schools into better communities of caring and support for young people" (p. 77). They suggested that when junior high or middle schools failed they did so, in large part, due to an inability to adapt to the unique emotional needs of adolescents:

> When young teenagers yearn for greater independence, we tighten the screws of classroom control. When they are most in need of care and support to guide them through the turbulent years leading to adulthood, we focus on teaching subject matter. . . and leave students' emotional needs to the peer group and gang (p. 159).

Although it could be argued that social problems seen in schools merely reflect what is occurring in society, research findings (e.g., Smith et al., 1995) point to empirical data against this view. The challenge becomes: how can schools best respond to their expanding responsibility to develop the social, as well as academic, skills of children within a safe and caring learning environment?

The Role of the Principal

Principals play a key role in creating a school climate, by influencing the direction that a school will take in adopting violence prevention strategies. Given the number of choices available to address violence, principals can choose to: (a) encourage programs and practices that focus on the prevention of serious disruptive behaviors; (b) rehabilitate those students who are affected by such behaviors; (c) support a retributive model, designed to control and discipline disruptive behaviors; or (d) increase the monitoring of student behavior, through such measures as surveillance cameras. By making such choices, the principal can play a significant role in either exacerbating or discouraging disruptive and violent behaviors (Toby, 1993).

For example, Kadel and Follam's work in Florida schools (1994) pointed to a reduction in antisocial behaviors when principals placed a high priority on establishing caring relationships with staff and students. Furthermore, the success of violence prevention strategies required the direct support and leadership of the school principal. Lieber and Rogers (1994) believed that the principal was pivotal in a number of ways: as a catalyst for introducing programs, determining what the staff needs were, and demonstrating an ongoing commitment by "walking the talk."

Although there is growing interest in compiling information as to which programs, practices, and initiatives are successful in schools and why, there is less known about the influences and variables most responsible for those decisions that principals do make. For example, are decisions made as a result of : (a) political pressure, (b) a desire to be viewed as being proactive, (c) a critical violent incident, (d) a perceived need, or (e) sound empirical evidence? The research described in this paper explored such questions.

Method and Data Source

The principles of grounded theory were used to guide the research method used in this study. It was a process involving both a deductive and an inductive interpretation of data.

A tentative theoretical framework was developed on the basis of literature reviewed, as well as prior research conducted in the area of school violence (e.g., MacDonald, 1995; MacDonald, 1997). The plausibility of emergent theories, derived from the data collected in this study, was confirmed by concurrently collecting and analyzing data, the use of memoing, and a constant comparative method of data analysis. The theoretical model and substantive theory were discussed with the 12 participants, who provided feedback and suggestions for minor revisions.

Sample

Principals from a large urban district in Western Canada were purposefully selected on the basis of their known involvement in school violence prevention initiatives (e.g., request for resources, participation in professional development, membership on committees addressing violence prevention). A senior administrator in the district was requested to compile a confidential list of names of junior high school principals who met these criteria. All twelve principals whose names were provided, were contacted and formed the data source for the study.

Interviews

This study utilized a semi-structured interview to gather insights from 12 junior high school principals in one large school district in Western Canada. The interviews took approximately 90 minutes and were conducted at each administrator's school office. A combination of closed and open form questions focused on: (a) how principals described violence in schools, (b) what factors influenced any initiatives and strategies designed to respond to violent behaviors in their schools, and (c) what processes were used in the decision making.

Demographics

The City

Kalmon is a Western Canadian city of just under 800,000 people. In the past three years, it has experienced a rapid population growth as a result of its growing economy. Until recently, the ethnic population was quite low, and newcomers to the city primarly arrived from other parts of Canada and the United States. As the business and financial capital of Western Canada, *Kalmon* is a cosmopolitan business center known for its entrepreneurial spirit and boasts one of the most educated workforces in the country.

The School District

The *Kalmon Public School District* is the second largest employer in the city, and serves 95,000 students throughout its 219 schools. An elected board of trustees oversees the general policies of the district which are administered by a senior staff that has been recently "downsized." Funding is provided by the provincial government, and each school receives a budget based on its student enrolment. In all financial matters pertaining to the school budget, including professional development, the principal remains the final authority.

The Schools

The principals of 12 schools, representing each of the four quadrants of the city were interviewed. The enrolment for these schools ranged from 300 to 700 students.

The schools represented a mix of socio-economic strata: four drew their student population from largely middle to upper income, white neighbourhoods; five were known as "high needs schools" with multi-ethnic, low-income neighbourhoods; and the remainder were middle-income, multi-ethnic schools. The schools identified as "high needs" were located in areas of the city with low-income housing, higher than the average crime rates, and a transient population - many of whom were on social assistance.

The Participants

Both genders were represented amongst the participants and each had an administrative experience of between 9 months and 15 years. Principals, ranging in age from early forties to late fifties, had been assigned to their current school for six or less years. Approximately one third of the principals had completed some post-graduate work, and 9 of the 12 had previously held administrative positions in what were designated as "high needs" schools.

Data Analysis

In accordance with Strauss's (1987) notion of open coding, concepts and themes emerged from the data as the transcripts were were read and reread. An integrative looping process included: (a) open coding, (b) data analysis, (c) theoretical memoing, (d) futher data analysis, and (e) interpretive diagramming to reflect theoretical "hunches."

Using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method of analysis, transcripts were reread allowing for a further reduction of data into more specific units of analysis. For example, coding which began as "themes" evolved into: (a) concepts (e.g., misbehavior-disruption-disobedience-breaking rules); (b) characters (e.g., references to staff, parents, students); and (c) items (e.g., policies, rules, contracts). Substantive theory that was loosely tied to a tentative framework was modified and expanded upon to reflect the interconnections that emerging from the data. The transcripts were revisited three times to ensure a rigorous analysis. Additional themes, that had been previously "missed," were integrated into a theory, which remained open to question and further refinement (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Findings and Discussion

The findings obtained from the data collected are summarized and discussed in three subsections: (a) how principals described violence in schools, (b) what factors influenced any

initiatives and strategies designed to respond to violent behaviors in their schools, and (c) what processes were used in the decision making.

Describing School Violence

When asked to describe school violence within the context of their schools, principals noted that: (a) violence was difficult to define; (b) violence could include a number of behaviors along a continuum, ranging from serious physical acts of aggression, to more covert behaviors such as intimidation; and (c) they were less concerned with defining violence than understanding and addressing its root causes.

The principals in this study stated that efforts to describe school violence neither represented the objectives of their decisions, nor accounted for the student behaviors that they considered to be problematic. Rather, they saw their efforts as focused more on the root causes of violence (e.g., a lack of attachment, an atmosphere of mistrust and uncaring), and not issues of delinquency (e.g., aggression, harassment, or intimidation):

> So the brochures and all that stuff (about violence) may be nice, but most of us couldn't care less . . . I think we have a responsibility for forming positive relationships with kids; I think that feeds them. (*Andi*)

Refusing to limit their conceptualization of violence to a list of behaviors, allowed principals to be more cognizant of the underlying causes that contributed to the violence. Participants related disruptive behaviors to the operation of a school: its policies, climate, and priorities. For example, the structure of junior high schools was seen to often constrain the ability of principals to build a sense of community:

> It's hard. In a junior high school you have one third of your population moving. You're always foreclosing your business and at the end of the year, you're re-establishing your business in a new year with a third of your population changing over. (*Cory*)

Principals believed that there was little cause for violence from students if they felt cared for, liked, connected, and wanted to be at school. As *Jamie* noted: "I'm not going to go out there preventing violence; I'm going out there to build a great school."

Influences on Decisions Related to School Violence

Values, assumptions, biases, and perceptions of the issues played a significant role in how these twelve principals conceptualized and operationalized decisions. They made choices

based on the importance they placed on: (a) the people (e.g., students), (b) the activities (e.g., schooling) , and (c) the types of relationships they viewed as important in their roles (e.g., staff, students). The core value reflected in the selection of strategies and programs was to place the needs and best interests of students at the center of all decisions.

Principals exercised their influence by adopting a "hands-on" approach to their role. For example, they incorporated their personal values into the hiring criteria of staff and often set aside administrative tasks so as to personally deal with students. There was no attempt to be remote, uninvolved, or distanced from ethical dilemmas (e.g., dealing with an abused student, unprofessional staff behavior). On the contrary, principals often extended their reach beyond the school premises and school hours (e.g., teen drinking, fighting off school grounds). They sought ways to provide students with opportunities to learn self-discipline by favouring expectations for behavior and social skill development, rather that an overemphasis on rules and punitive discipline. For these reasons, zero tolerance policies, which were used as a means to remove misbehaving students from school, were not practiced by any of the twelve principals.

Although principals did not discount the desirability of dealing proactively with issues, they felt that basing decisions on identified needs, was more realistic. As *Cory* stated: "I think a lot of what goes on in schools has that component of reactive positioning and posturing and that's not all necessarily bad." In a similar vein, *Bobbie* described a hot lunch program that was implemented as a way of fulfilling students' nutritional needs. In the end, the outcome was a reduction in afternoon misbehaviors - behaviors that we believed to be directly linked to a lack of food.

A central belief of the participants in this study was that "a great junior high school" balanced academic and social skill development:

> In working with kids, curriculum is secondary and that is where some teachers are running into problems. Its because they're driving the curriculum before they're driving the student because all their mind is curriculum, not the students and if that's it, you're dead. (*Pat*)

Principals clearly indicated that they did not focus on strategies or programs specifically designed to prevent or reduce violence. Rather, they directed their energies on creating a school climate that rejected violent behaviors by assessing the needs of students and ensuring that those needs were met.

In order to facilitate a school climate that could identify the needs of students, principals facilitated a positive rapport between teachers and students by restructuring their school into

smaller units (mini schools within schools). Positioning their role as that of a "service provider," accountable for delivering a quality education that best met the unique needs of each student, the expulsion of a student was seen as the school's failure to properly identify and meet those unique needs. The refusal to practice the district's zero tolerance policy was thus considered an oppositional stance that these principals were prepared to take because it reflected their commitment to "do what was best for the student."

Knowing "what was best of the student" involved a five step process: (a) an identification of needs, through establishing meaningful relationship with staff and students; (b) a consideration of alternatives, which were influenced by personal beliefs and values; (c) a validation of options through consultation with staff and students; and (d) creating an environment which empowered staff to choose and implement solutions that were congruent with the principal's beliefs.

Decision-making Processes

The findings suggested that principals' decisions were influenced by how they conceptualized school violence and the role of schools. Drawing on their knowledge and understanding of the struggles faced by adolescents, principals targeted decisions to meet the multiple needs of students without separating goals into reducing or preventing violence.

Towards this end, their decision-making process centred on four aspects: (a) identification of students' needs; (b) consideration of alternative stragegies to address those needs, as influenced by personal beliefs and experience; (c) validation of choices through consultation with staff and students; and (d) empowerment of staff to choose from amongst several alternatives. Strategies or programs, that were adopted, had as desirable outcomes: (a) establishing a climate of mutual respect, (b) providing students with a sense of belonging, and (c) creating an environment that was safe, welcoming, and caring.

Principals recognized problems, identified the outcomes of decisions, responded to the needs of others, took risks, and were prepared to delegate decision making to those who they knew shared the same vision of schooling and education. Visible leadership was demonstrated by walking the halls, welcoming buses, and inviting students to share their views on what improvements could be made in the school. Student input and feedback on their perceptions of school climate were actively solicited, valued, and acted upon when practicable to do so.

For the principals in this study, leadership style significantly influenced the decision-making process. Many of the participants described this style metaphorically as a: "planter of

seeds," "empowerer," or "Messiah." Starratt (1995) described this as a leadership that institutionalizes a vision and expresses the school's core values.

Principals chose staff that shared their same commitment to the establishment of a school that met the needs of all students, be they academic or emotional needs. Hiring like-minded staff, who shared their personal beliefs regarding the schooling of adolescents, facilitated a common interpretation of the role of staff- congruent with principals' strongly held personal values and beliefs (Hoy and Miskel, 1993). Deal and Peterson (1990) suggested that principals were responsible for how others interpreted what mattered in the school. By clearly communicating their beliefs, principals in this study, ensured that decision-making processes focused on what mattered most to them: strategies related to building a sense of community, empowering students, and meeting students' emotional and academic needs.

Empowering staff to seek choose effective strategies or resources, to address a defined need, was successful because principals exercised a leadership style that would: (a) ensure that staff, students, and parents were committed to shared goals and purposes, (b) provide opportunities for staff and students to find creative ways of dealing with problems, (c) foster a caring, trusting, and harmonious teaching-learning environment, and (d) support, inspire and appreciate the exemplary efforts of staff and students.

Conclusions

This study was designed to explore principals' decision-making strategies regarding initiatives at the junior high school level related to violence prevention, or response. The findings were intended to offer insights into current directions in school-based violence prevention or response strategies.

A review of the literature indicated that there were differing conceptualizations of school violence: as physical and/or verbal action, a symptom or problem, delinquency or disruption. Due to these differences, the need to understand how principals framed school violence was established to be a major first step in this study.

On the basis of the interview data, principals described violence in broad terms, conceptualizing it as a symptom of other problems that were often under the direct control of schools. Given principals' interpretation of school violence and their subsequent choice of strategies, the following definition of violence is offered as a representative view of the the 12 participants :

> School violence represents those actual or threatened behaviors or actions, that are symptomatic of an unfulfilled need (e.g., to belong, have power, seek approval), expressed in the form of sexual, emotional, or physical harm, that has a deleterious effect on establishing and maintaining a safe and caring school climate. (MacDonald, 1998)

In terms of decisions related to school violence, principals were guided by what they perceived to be their students' needs, as well as their own personal vision of schooling and leadership. Principals believed that junior high school students needed to feel connected to a community of caring, wherein a balance of academic, social and emotional skills were taught. As important, was the belief that students learnt and oftened adopted social skills on the basis of what they observed in the interactions or modeling of others. Thus, clear expectations for appropriate behavior included teachers as well as students.

Discipline, when necessary, was regarded as an opportunity to teach students interpersonal skills, rather than viewed as a way of punishing "social illiteracy." Furthermore, discipline - as a learning opportunity- required justice, compassion, as well as increased opportunities for creative problem solving and self-discipline. As such, policies that were largely punitive in nature (e.g., zero tolerance) were not practised, despite the district's promotion of them.

Principals recognized problems, identified the outcomes of decisions, responded to the needs of others, took risks, and were prepared to delegate decision making to those who they knew shared the same vision of schooling and education. Empowering staff and achieving a personal vision of schooling was facilitated by organizing a followership with similar goals and values. This could best be achieved by hiring "like-minded" staff who related well to students and believed in modeling those behaviors expected of students.

Principals exercised a leadership style that would: (a) ensure that staff, students, and parents were committed to shared goals and purposes, (b) provide opportunities for staff and students to find creative ways of dealing with problems, (c) foster a caring, trusting, and harmonious teaching-learning environment, and (d) support, inspire and appreciate the exemplary efforts of staff and students.

Theoretical Model

On the basis of applied techniques central to grounded theory research (e.g., open coding, constant comparison of data, theoretical memoing) the following substantive theory is suggested:

> exemplary junior high school principals (e.g., visible leaders, risk takers, child advocates), influenced by a number of factors (e.g., philosophy of schooling, role definition, previous experience); will identify needs (e.g., maintaining a safe and caring school climate, child advocacy) through a decision-making process (e.g., identify viable alternatives, gather confirming evidence, empower staff and students) that achieve specific outcomes (e.g., reduction in school violence, pro-social skill development, meeting the needs of students).

Specific elements, critical to this theory suggest that:

1. School violence is symptomatic of other problems that are often under the direct control of schools.
2. Exemplary principals are motivated to expand their role and that of their school to meet the emotional, social, and academic needs of students.
3. Caregiver and service provider orientations dominate the language of exemplary principals.
4. Empowerment is most effective when leaders empower "like-minded" staff.
5. Promoting and providing opportunities for positive relationships amongst staff and students facilitates a safe and caring school.

In terms of school violence, the principals in this study responded through a decision-making process that focused on the goal of meeting a number of identified needs that violence was merely a symptom of. Initiatives had as desired outcomes: (a) establishing a climate of mutual respect, (b) providing students with a sense of belonging, and (c) creating an environment that was safe, welcoming, and caring.

Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions that principals interpret school violence as a symptom of other problems - often under the direct control of schools - and do not make decisions on the basis of "reducing violence," it is recommended that school authorities redirect efforts from reducing or preventing " violence," to strategies that enable and encourage a safe and caring school climate.

The importance of the emotional, social and academic development of students suggests that schools revisit and expand their measures of student successes beyond academic criteria. Efforts to provide students with a balanced skill set (e.g., conflict resolution, social skills necessary to build and sustain positive interpersonal relationships), should be encouraged and viewed as an integral component of schooling.

In this study, exemplary principals were motivated by a desire to create a school climate which reflected an advocacy of teenagers and a leadership and staff that took the time to develop meaningful relationships with the students. On the basis of this conclusion, it is recommended that superintendents take into account the time requirements needed for principals to be "visible leaders" when delegating administrative duties.

Finally, teacher preparation and professional development might consider at what point their pedagogy explores philosophies of discipline, the conceptualization of violence, the role of policies and school practices influencing student behaviors, and social skill development. Research in education could contribute to this more holistic view by studying the attributes of exemplary, not just delinquent or disruptive students.

Significance

Expanding current perspectives of how and why principals responded to increased public pressure to address school-based violence was deemed a significant implication of engaging in this research. It is felt that insights gained from this study will be instrumental in determining which attitudes and conditions most influence response, intervention and prevention of school violence.

By studying the individual and societal influences which guide principals' decisions in dealing with school violence, it was hoped that readers would be informed of the rationale behind the directions schools are taking in their efforts to deal with this complex issue. In part, it was hoped that this data could form a baseline reference which would be useful at such a time when more extensive evaluation of school-based violence prevention programs were initiated. Understanding why resources were allocated, or policy decisions made, may serve to enhance future understandings of the nature and extent of violence in schools, and the reasons for the success or failure of choices that were made to address it.

Reflections

Efforts directed at defining and recasting behaviors as delinquent, disruptive, or violent, have perpetuated the notion that students have problems in need of "fixing." The result is a failure to concede that there may be an underlying pedagogy, within schools, based on power, dominance, control, and subservience that fosters the very behaviors that educators feel unduly pressured to deal with.

The contribution that this study makes is to position school violence as an educational issue, beyond that of criminality or delinquency, involving the entire school community. As an educational issue, decisions that principals make provide insights into the role of schooling, the values and beliefs underpinning discipline policies, what behaviors are violent, characteristics of exemplary leadership, effective decision-making strategies, and the elements of a safe and caring school climate.

Reconceptualizing violence as an outcome of larger issues - often under the control of schools- leads to a rethinking of the objectives and outcomes of the entire enterprise we call "schooling." At a time when corporations criticize schools for their failure to impart relevant knowledge and skills, the public laments the lack of self-discipline among youth, and families struggle to maintain an influence on the moral development of their children, educators lament the increased demands that are placed on them. The principals in this study, however, were prepared to revisit, expand, and embrace their role in the social, emotional, as well as academic development of their students. They understood that imparting skills, attitudes, and knowledge would require an environment that was both safe and caring - an environment that school staff were largely responsible for creating. As Bibby and Posterski (1992) suggested, "the source and stimulus of the violence that occurs in schools flows out of the culture that cradles the school" (p.229). Ultimately, it is the principal who imparts the ethos, values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape a school's culture and climate.

School-based violence prevention programs can succeed if they are implemented to address an identified need. Perhaps the larger issue is <u>how</u> that need is identified and validated by those closest to the "problem." Any strategy or program designed to address school violence must include a critical examination of who or what is defined as a "problem." Navigating toward a safe and caring school demands that, principals especially, lead by example - choosing to model behaviors expected of their students, resolving differences without aggression, and replacing intolerance of adolescent "angst" with compassion, understanding, and a genuine interest in their well being.

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